DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 229 730 CS 007 102

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TITLE Linguistic Perspectives on Minority Education. Technical Report No. 275.
INSTITUTION Bolt, Beranek and Newman, Inc., Cambridge, Mass.; Illinois Univ., Urbana. Center for the Study of Reading.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE May 83
CONTRACT 400-81-0030
GRANT NIE-G-78-0082
NOTE 77p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Language; Classroom Communication; Comparative Analysis; Cultural Differences; Elementary Education; Language Acquisition; Language Patterns; *Language Usage; *Linguistics; *Linguistic Theory; *Minority Group Children; *Reading Difficulties; *Reading Research; Student Teacher Relationship; Working Class
IDENTIFIERS Conversation

ABSTRACT

Using a comparative and historical approach, this paper examines linguistic perspectives on minority education, specifically language-based explanations for the reading problems of working class minority group students. The paper first discusses the ways in which competence and performance theories of language treat the relation between language and social groups, then uses this discussion as a comparative backdrop to a reappraisal of the deficit and difference hypothesis of language usage. Next, the paper reviews the dynamics of class and minority status and discusses these dynamics in light of findings concerning two major types of linguistic/cultural mismatches in the classroom: (1) those of participation structures, and (2) those of dialogue-like versus monologue-like styles of discourse. On the basis of this review, the paper argues that the "mismatch" hypothesis must consider the ways in which institutional ideologies about language use and literacy influence classroom interaction. The paper then summarizes two studies focusing on the ways discourse coherence and processes of conversation influence literacy-related activities in educational settings. The paper concludes that such studies can enrich the understanding both of the role of culture in face-to-face communication and of the complex communicative events leading to the acquisition of literacy skills. (Contains an extensive bibliography). (FL)

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ED229730

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Technical Report No. 275

LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON MINORITY EDUCATION

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May 1983

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The following report is an extensive revision of the author's departmental qualifying paper (Linguistics, UCB). The research and writing was supported in part by NIE Grant No. G-78-0082 and by a Research Associateship with the Center for the Study of Reading in 1981. I am indebted to a host of colleagues for their critical comments and suggestions. They include Niyi Akinnaso, Douglas Campbell, Kitty Corbett, Lili Fillmore, John Gumperz, William Hall, Anne Hayes and Paul Jose (who reviewed the initial manuscript for CSR), Robin Lakoff, Johanna Nichols, Daniel Nugent, and Amparo Tuson.

CS007102

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Abstract

This review examines linguistic perspectives on minority education, and in particular, language-based explanations for the reading problems of working-class minority students. The approach is comparative and historical. The ways in which competence (stru..ral) and performance (-lectal) theories of language treat the relation between language and social groups is discussed, as is a large literature concerning the interaction of social structure, culturally-defined tasks, and language use and change. This discussion provides a comparative backdrop to a reappraisal of the deficit and difference hypothesis. After this reappraisal, I briefly sketch the dynamics of class and minority status. The effect of these dynamics on social relations is discussed in the light of findings concerning two major types of linguistic/cultural mismatches in the classroom: (a) those of participation structures; and (b) those of dialogue-like vs. monologue-like styles of discourse. On the basis of the general review I then argue that an adequate treatment of the "mismatch" hypothesis must consider the ways in which institutional ideologies about language use and literacy influence classroom interaction, and in particular, the assessment and treatment of the socioculturally subordinate. Two studies by the author are summarized at length. One is concerned with the influence of narrative style on early literacy practice, the other with the interaction of discourse style, teaching technique, and "tracking" in reading groups. Both studies focus on the way discourse coherence and processes of conversation influence literacy-related activities in educational settings. Such research, and the more general tradition on which it draws, offers to enrich our understanding both of the role of culture in face-to-face communication and of the complex communicative events leading to the acquisition of literacy skills.

Linguistic Perspectives on Minority Education

This paper is concerned with linguistic perspectives on minority education. An important theme is the role of language use in children's academic performance. Rather than simply survey the contributions of current research within linguistics to educational theory, I will take a historical perspective and focus on the ways in which language has been proposed as an explanation for a major educational problem: the high rates of failure of working-class minority students in public schools. After a review of the conceptual and methodological bases of two major proposals, I will argue that a more adequate approach to the problem is to examine the conflict between the major institutional goal of formal education and community-based differences in the organization of talk. The central issue of communicative discontinuities between the home and the school will be discussed from two perspectives: (a) the forces that create and maintain linguistic differences in modern industrial societies and (b) the nature of situational determinants of linguistic performance.

The theory underlying the discussion holds that different social class and ethnic groups are socialized to use language to accomplish different purposes. A chief assumption is that the process of socialization involves the acquisition of a particular social identity which is composed of various culturally sanctioned roles for a particular social class or cultural group. These roles, in turn, specify sets of social actions that are appropriate in certain contexts. Prominent in this repertoire of actions to be learned by an individual are actions performed by speech. This view assumes, therefore, that speech and speech conventions are learned in terms of particular social relationships and situations. The forces quite naturally produce

competent speakers within one's own social context, but this may lead to difficulties if a person has acquired different conventions from those encountered in the classroom (Hall, Collins, & Jose, 1981). More specifically, it may lead to negative evaluation, especially in educational systems which cannot reliably separate measures of Standard English skills from measures of other learning skills and, as a corollary cannot consistently distinguish ethnic-bound and class-bound differences in communicative style from individual differences in ability (cf. Bourdieu, 1977, and Bernstein, 1975, for similar observations).

An implication of the theoretical framework sketched above is that although patterns of language use may seem to reflect social structure, and in particular, the class and ethnic stratification common to the United States and most Western industrial nations, these patterns are best analyzed in terms of communicative situations. That is to say, language use patterns are better understood in terms of particular communicative contexts and goals, rather than in terms of an overly broad correlation of class, code, and educational outcome.

The consistently low educational achievement of low-income minority students became a public issue during the 1950's and 60's, in the context of more general political struggles for civil rights. The first language-based explanations of this failure took the form of deficit theories. Proponents of this position, who were not linguists, argued that children from working-class, minority backgrounds failed in school because they came from linguistically or cognitively "deprived" backgrounds. This proposal soon came under attack, from linguists, psychologists, and anthropologists, both for its conception of social structure and its use of linguistic

evidence. Critics argued that the language of minority students was not deficient, but rather derived from autonomous cultural and linguistic systems. The confrontation between adherents of deficit and difference explanations raised a number of basic methodological problems for the study of language in society.

In arguing that lower-class and minority homes were communicatively deficient, deficit advocates were making an implicit comparison between the language used in the home and the language required for effective learning in the school. On this point, proponents of deficit and difference models agreed: Both maintained that there are critical differences between the communicative conventions found in minority communities and the communicative conventions required in the school, and that the differences are principal factors in school failure. The shared problematic of both models is the question of communicative discontinuities between the home and school. I will attempt to get at this question by addressing two distinct but related issues. The first concerns the genesis of communities and institutions through the tensions of class and ethnic antagonisms. The second concerns the conflict between community-based ways of organizing talk, as documented in the sociolinguistic and ethnographic literature, and the goal-oriented organization of talk found in formal educational settings. This conflict, or "mismatch," takes many forms. Two which shall be discussed in detail below concern: (a) structures for participation in the acquisition and display of knowledge, and (b) the relation between speaker/audience collaboration and the kind of discourse produced.

The sources of critical differences in communicative conventions are difficult to determine. And the assessment of their effect on educational

processes and outcomes remains an area of controversy. The way theories of language have been used in this controversy reflects a dichotomy in twentieth century studies of language: between (a) theories which seek to model language structure; and (b) those which seek to model language use. On the one hand there has been a concern with language as a self-sufficient, rule-governed system--that is, as an abstract capacity for communication. On the other hand, there has been a concern with linguistic performance--that is, with the contextual variability of language use. The former concern has provided a well-motivated theory of the discrete nature of language structure. But the theory and method have been limited to the single function of making reference and to the level of sentences. The assumptions and methods of this approach, while necessary for certain descriptive tasks, are inadequate for analyzing the interaction of language and social life. As is discussed more fully below, the conception of language as an implicit norm for making reference has lent itself to the identification of a single language with a single community, whether that community is defined as an ethnic enclave or a nation-state. The other concern is with linguistic performance. This approach, through the study of language use in actual speech communities, has explored various sorts of relations between speech forms and social settings, both within and across languages and social groups. The studies in this tradition contribute to an understanding of the genesis and maintenance of linguistic differences in modern urban societies. In addition, by documenting the importance of situation for linguistic performance, studies of variation highlight a basic problem in the use of linguistic evidence in educational research. The problem is that of situated interpretation: Unless experiments and surveys of linguistic

structure and ability have some control over setting, topic, and participants' interpretation of task, they do not control the basic variables of situated speech; hence comparisons of the performance of individuals or groups are suspect; and many of the claims about cognitive processes or linguistic abilities, since they are stated in terms of a structuralist model, need to be critically examined.

Structural Models and Educational Explanation

In what follows I will be briefly discussing the relationship between the conceptions of linguistic and social units found in the two traditions and the way in which language has been put forth as an explanation for variations in educational achievement. Although structural theories of language have typically been associated with various forms of linguistic "relativity" (the view that all languages are communicatively equal because they are coherent, conceptually complex systems, and adequate vehicles for referential communication), I would like to suggest that the advocacy of relativity has been weakened by the structuralistic view of the language-society nexus. Let us examine this argument in more detail.

Deficit and difference models assume different relations between language and social organization. The former assumes a one-to-one correspondence, with variation treated as deficiency; the latter assumes a pluralistic fit between languages and social units. The deficit models coincide, at least in their assumption of a one-to-one fit between language and society, with structuralist, or competence, theories of linguistic structure. Difference models coincide, in their assumption of multi-faceted relations, with dialectal theories of linguistic structure and a tradition of study of the uses of language in speech communities.

This section will briefly treat two aspects of most structural models of language: (a) their assumption of a simple correspondence between language and community; and (b) their focus on the referring and predicating sentence as the basic unit of analysis. I will argue that as linguists have addressed units of structure larger than the sentence, and functions other than reference, their work has moved towards a tradition of language study which focuses on the interrelations of language and social structure.

Sentence-level Grammars

The most influential structuralist theories provide a troublesome warrant to a central assumption of deficit theory: that language is a homogenous unit, which all members of a given society must be able to use. The idea that there exists a homogenous norm, which all speakers of a language must share, is central to structural theories. These theories have pivoted on what I will call the concept of a referential norm. This norm may be defined as the phonological, lexical, and syntactic rules for the interpretation of the referential sentences of a given language. It serves as the standard against which all individual variation is measured (Sapir, 1921).

This conception views language as a summarizing idealization of the means by which referring and predicating sentences are constructed. It has been held by the most influential linguists of this century. It is the model put forth by Saussure (1916/59), with his distinction between langue--language structure--and parole--speech or performance. Although Bloomfield (1933) treated dialect variation in great detail, he posited a one-to-one relation between language and a community of speakers, adopting a position on language structure very close to that of Saussure and Sapir.

The foremost exponent of transformational-generative grammar, Chomsky (1965), postulated a basic correspondence between language and a homogenous community of speakers. None of these scholars, of course, simply equated the referential norm, or grammar, with standard dialects; in fact, they explicitly argued otherwise (cf. Bloomfield, 1933; Sapir, 1931-a; and a recent appraisal of prescriptivism in linguistic theory, Newmeyer, 1978). Nevertheless, it has been characteristic of twentieth century structuralist theory to assume that the most important function of language is that of making sentence-level literal reference, and further, to assert that language is essentially a norm for making reference which holds across some abstract speech community (Bloomfield, 1933; Chomsky, 1965; Sapir, 1921; Saussure, 1916/59).

The focus on the referential function and the idealization of community provided a theory which permitted rigorous comparative study of language structure. This conception of linguistic structure was key in setting the limits of the discipline and in justifying successive levels of analysis. As is well known, structuralist models treat language as a hierarchy of elements and relations, extending from phonological and lexical components to syntactic constituents, and closing with the sentence. The hierarchy is established by syntagmatic and paradigmatic alternation, based upon the ways in which changes in form parallel changes in propositional meaning. This conception of structure represents a rich theory of cognitive capacity (Chomsky, 1975) and unconscious cultural transmission (Sapir, 1927), which does not reduce to simple behaviorist theories of learning and cognition.

Extending Analysis to Discourse

But the model concerns an abstract, implicit capacity; the relation of linguistic competence to linguistic performance is always problematic. And the difficulties inherent in the competence/performance relation became more obvious once the levels of structure up to and including the sentence had been surveyed. By this time a breakwater of sorts had been reached within structural linguistics. The need to go beyond the sentence was announced in various quarters; for example, by syntacticians (Morgan, 1971) and semanticists (Fillmore, 1975). Methodological canons of substitutability and segmentability no longer held a privileged place because the object of analysis was open to debate. Whereas before the upper domain of analysis had been the sentence, henceforth the scope of analysis was expanded to include issues of comprehension and speech-as-social-action. As the primacy of structuralist and structuralist-generative models for the description of language was called into question, along with the earlier assumption of simple correspondence between language and speech community, those concerned with linguistic structure moved into an arena of inquiry which intersected the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and the cognitive sciences. The structure and processes of discourse, of connected talk in context, became the focus of attention. In this way those researchers working within the structuralist paradigm moved toward the other major tradition of linguistic investigation: the study of language variation in social communities.

Speech Community and Variation

The studies reviewed in this section document the complexity of linguistic and cultural diffusion. They introduce the general reader to an important tradition of linguistic and anthropological study of the influence

of situation and task on linguistic performance. In documenting processes of diffusion and the influence of context on performance, these studies provide support for the hypothesis that important discontinuities exist between the communicative traditions transmitted in working-class and minority communities and the communicative demands made in the school setting.

The complex performance variation attested in these studies accentuates the unreliability of measures of linguistic and cognitive ability which implicitly assume a single language competence and a single way of organizing discourse. Such measures are suspect because careful comparative studies of language use in Western and non-Western societies have shown that the analysis of patterns of language use must take into account two differing kinds of social facts: (a) macrosociological variables such as gender, class and ethnic identity; and (b) microsociological variables such as communicative situations and tasks as understood by participants. Studies which have attended to such variables have shown that variation is inherent in speech communities. Further, they have demonstrated that social attitudes and contextually specific tasks such as defining group boundaries motivate language variation. They reinforce the point that shared referential norms cannot be assumed and, further, that actual behavior and evaluation are likely to diverge from any self-reported use of language. By documenting the complex sources of linguistic variation, such studies heighten our appreciation of the inherently intricate relationship between language use and variations in educational achievement. Let us now turn to a central concept in much of this work.

Social Structure, Task, and Variation

Whereas the notion of language as a referential norm provided a conceptual guide to structural linguistics, the concept of speech community has provided a similar focus for much of the work on dialectal and stylistic variation (Hymes, 1964). The concept is of a social entity. At its most abstract, speech community may be considered a field of action in which phonetic change, language shift, and linguistic borrowing are caused by social forces, not internal structural pressure (Gumperz, 1968). Defined as an interaction matrix of varying degrees of generality, the notion of speech community is an elastic concept that varies along a communication axis ranging from familial intimacy, with its maximal abbreviation of speech signals, up to the international networks of scholars, who share knowledge of certain literary standards and communicate through published materials.

Most descriptive work on language in speech communities falls along two dimensions. On the one hand, there is the problem of the boundaries of communities and of identifying situations and events within a community. On the other hand, there is the question of variation, both within and across languages.

Anthropologists and linguists who have turned their attention to the study of recurrent tasks and situations in both Western and non-Western societies have shown that tasks and situations cut across phonology, lexicon, and syntax. They have also shown that various sorts of social structure must be taken into account in defining tasks and situations. Haas' early report (1944) on men's and women's speech among the Koasati is the paradigm case where the work of distinguishing gender-defined groups in tribal society goes to the core phonology of the language. Dixon's (1971)

description of Australian "mother-in-law" speech documents a case where the work of signalling the presence in the audience of an affinal relative entails a strict bifurcation of the lexicon into core verbs vs. all other word classes. Geertz's (1960) account of deference behavior in Javanese society posits nine distinct levels of morphology and lexicon. These levels are manipulated to indicate status relations between interlocutors and referents, in accordance with caste and class divisions in modern Indonesian society. In a work describing language use in a society without class stratification or a literate tradition, Newman (1955) showed the dependence of Zuni vocabulary registers on situation and cultural attitude. Concerning our own society, Lakoff (1975) has argued that lexicon, syntax, and the use of qualifying "hedges" are a function of power assymetries, especially those of gender.

Studies focusing on the variation of languages and dialects within the same community have discovered the difficulty of determining whether two or more referential norms are in use. They have documented the conflicting principles used in assigning language boundaries and have described the use of "code-switching" (switching languages or dialects during conversation) to perform various sociolinguistic tasks. One finding of these studies is that entire "languages" may be manipulated to accomplish such functions as signalling group boundaries. Ferguson (1959) draws on materials from Europe, North Africa, and the Caribbean to show how diverse histories result in the same sociolinguistic complex: A "diglossic" community split by high-status and low-status referential norms. Wolff's (1959) study of an African polyglot area shows how social attitudes can override structural similarity when speakers are reporting language boundaries, thus affecting the definition

of both speech community and referential norm. The African case is paralleled in multilingual communities on various European borders. There one finds conflicting allegiances to national standard languages and local speech habits (Bloomfield, 1933). Recent work on code-switching in Europe and the United States describes how speakers manipulate grammatical units from all levels of language--phonology, morphology, lexicon, and syntax--in order to signal group identity, topic involvement, and affect (Blom & Gumperz, 1972; Gumperz & Herasimchuk, 1972; Gumperz & Hernandez-Chavez, 1972).

Variation and Change in Communities and Individuals

Viewed from a historical perspective, synchronic variation presents a picture of change in process in a given speech community (Weinreich, Labov, & Herzog, 1968). Although at first glance concern with variation-as-change might seem far afield from educational issues, such concern is in fact germane to the deficit/difference controversy. Studies which have attempted to account for the development and direction of variation have emphasized that grammatical and pragmatic systems frequently diffuse in different ways. They provide a useful perspective on the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity which public schooling must either accommodate or repress in its attempts to transmit literacy and numeracy skills. By identifying some of the dimensions and sources of linguistic variability such research reveals the complexity of communicative norms and emphasizes the likelihood that such norms will not be shared across a given population.

As is discussed more fully below, there are several approaches to the study of variation and change. One venerable tradition of research has concentrated on the diffusion of grammatical elements across linguistic

areas. More recent studies have investigated the diffusion of discourse conventions across language and community boundaries. Another tradition has studied variation within single languages with an eye to identifying the social causes of intra-linguistic change. Related to this last approach, but distinct, are studies which have focused on the social processes which result in language maintenance and language shift.

What studies in the different traditions severally show is that elements from differing levels of grammar as well as discourse conventions of language use differentially spread across language and community boundaries. Further, they show that social attitudes and networks of association are important in the development of this spreading. The studies below provide historical and sociolinguistic perspectives on the question of what it means to learn a language, illustrating the complexity of the process of acquisition, for a community or an individual, and indicating some of the areas where gaps and overlaps occur. Again, these issues are relevant for the education of minorities. When local norms for the organization of talk and conduct diverge from the grammatical system, the reliability of our institutional measures of ability is thrown into doubt.

As the linguistic record of New World languages amply documents, the cross-linguistic diffusion of linguistic and pragmatic systems is a common occurrence. In Boas' classic "Introduction" to North American languages, he reviewed the evidence attesting the spread of morphological and syntactical systems across large areas of the continent (Boas, 1911). In a recent survey, Nichols (1971) examined the widespread diffusion in the American West of a phonetic system for signalling affective contrasts such as familiarity:formality and contempt:respect. Jacobsen (1980) described

the diffusion of basic semantic contrast systems across much of the same area. These studies, as well as several classic studies of language variation on the Indian subcontinent (Emeneau, 1956; Gumperz, 1958), provide evidence that various parts of grammatical and pragmatic subsystems have spread across numerous language and community boundaries.

Recent studies in Europe, the United States, and Canada have focused on the diffusion of conventions for the organization of discourse. In a study of speech-areas in Europe it is reported that Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, and Southern Germany share conventions for greeting, acceptable topics of inquiry, and sequencing of topics (cited in Hymes, 1974). Research on inter-ethnic communication in Britain and the United States has suggested that prosodic systems, important for both sentence meaning and conversational interaction, are areally distributed. For example, although the grammatical resources of Asian-English derive from Standard Anglo-American English, the prosodic (intonational) resources used in the dialect derive from the Asian Indian linguistic area (Gumperz & Kaltman, 1980). Studies of Native American speech communities have reported that these communities combine the grammatical means of English with indigenous conventions for what counts as a coherent sequence, acceptable topic, and normal duration of silence. In an intensive analysis of Cree-English bilingual encounters in Canada, Urion (1978) has shown that intonation and pausing follows the Cree pattern in the speech of bilinguals whose first language is Cree. This interference causes confusion in their Anglo interlocutors and is generally detrimental to inter-ethnic communication. Social anthropologists have described indigenous norms for the use of silence in face-to-face encounters among the Southwestern Apache, Navajo, and Papago

(Basso, 1972) and the Cherokee and Sioux (Dumont, 1972). This research has emphasized the pervasive use of these strategies in bilingual encounters, especially in educational settings. Linguists working in Athapaskan communities in Alaska and Canada have described the ways members of these speech communities combine sentence-level English grammar with the prosodic characteristics and genre-frameworks of traditional Athapaskan stories (Scollon & Scollon, 1979, 1981).

The implication of the research in Europe, Asia, and North America is that under certain social conditions, discussed more fully below, elements of linguistic and discourse structure may be variously diffused across communities and language areas. Analysis cannot assume that the elements correlate with a given referential norm, that is, with a given "language." Instead, it is necessary to distinguish two kinds of historical change--genetic-historical change and more short-term network-based diffusion of discourse patterns--in situating a type of linguistic behavior as part of a particular language or rhetorical tradition.

The social forces which produce diffusion and variation are difficult to identify, but some of the more promising studies of the issue have examined the role of networks of social relations in language diffusion, acquisition and change. In an early work, Hockett (1950) argued that peer networks were central forces in linguistic continuity and change. In several important papers Labov has discussed the central importance of patterns of social interaction in causing linguistic change (Labov, 1963, 1972-d). In their work on inner-city dialects, Labov and his associates provided empirical evidence of the important role played by adolescent peer-networks in the acquisition and maintenance of Black English Vernacular.

In particular, they found that the most intense use of BEV occurred among inner-city teenagers (Labov, Cohen, & Robbins, 1969). In a recent comparative study of young second-language learners, Fillmore (1979) has emphasized the importance of social relations in learning a second language. Her study reported on the progress of five second-language learners over the course of a year. She argued that the need to generate and maintain friendly interaction with native-speakers of the target language accounted for much of actual schedule of acquisition of L2 (second language) language structures.

Last, two recent studies of language change, in rural Austria (Gumperz, 1976) and urban Northern Ireland (Milroy & Margrain, 1980), have argued that the process of language change is directly linked to changes in networks of interpersonal relations. The perspective on networks differs in the two studies. The Ireland study treated networks simply as people making contact within given domains, such as work, family, and friendship gatherings. The Austrian study stressed that it was not simply contact, but the nature of the social relationship--for example, not merely that people work in spatial-temporal proximity, but rather that they must persuade one another to undertake certain actions--which determines language maintenance and language-shift. Both studies emphasized that correlations between linguistic behavior and categories such as sex, class, or ethnic identity provide little direct insight into the sources of language variation and change. The Austrian study showed that networks form around certain kinds of institutions, which define communicative goals. Participation in the networks is tied to the use of shared communicative conventions in attaining these goals. An example from the study would be Austrian youth

of Slovenian extraction who use German in their work in the growing (and German-oriented) tourist industry. Social networks thus play a pivotal role in language maintenance and shift because they mediate between social institutions and the personal, communicative relations into which those institutions devolve.

If we return to the question of what it means to learn a language, the foregoing studies of diffusion, variation, and change offer two general conclusions. The first is that part of the process of acquisition varies, both for individuals and social groups. It is of course well known that much of individual language acquisition is highly invariable, that is, there are universals of language development which hold across languages and cultures. These universals include the development of such "cognitive prerequisites" for grammar as the ability to deduce principles of surface order (e.g., word order), the ability to identify continuous segments (e.g., words) and the ability to incorporate sentences within sentences (Slobin, 1973). However, if we are concerned with less universalistic aspects of language acquisition, what the preceding studies indicate is that parts of grammar, and conventions for language use, can be acquired in different ways at different stages in the development of an individual or a social group.

A second conclusion is that social relations are crucial in both individual language learning and group-wide language change. Fillmore has shown this for second-language acquisition and a number of recent studies have demonstrated the importance of mother-child conversation in first-language acquisition (Snow & Ferguson, 1977; Wells, 1981). Furthermore, as the studies of areal diffusion indicated, elements of grammar and pragmatic

systems frequently diffuse across language and social group boundaries. The lesson to be drawn from studies of diffusion, language learning, and language and dialect shift is that changes in grammar and discourse conventions diffuse through social networks which vary in structure, intensity, and institutional locus.

The documented complexity of processes of diffusion, acquisition, and more broadly, of the interaction of language and social structure, supports the claim that critical discontinuities exist between the communicative traditions transmitted in working-class and minority communities and the communicative demands made in educational settings. It is against this background that we should evaluate the two best known linguistic explanations for unequal educational achievement.

Deficit and Difference Models

Mindful of the situational and task variation outlined above, we are now in a position to review and re-assess the deficit and difference explanations. Both accounts are inadequate, in part because of their restriction to sentence-level grammatical phenomena, in part because of their static conception of social structure. Nevertheless, the rival hypotheses converge on an important and unsettled issue: the role of discontinuities between the language patterns of the home and community vs. those of the school in producing the low educational achievement of many working-class and minority students.

Deficit Models and Their Limitations

When the failure of these students in school became a public issue, communication deficiencies, variously defined, were proposed as the major

cause of that failure. It was argued that there exist class and cultural differences in children's language, both in its structure and function. An initial source of inspiration for deficit theorists was the early work in Britain on social class differences in language use. In these studies of Bernstein, the ways in which working-class and middle-class youths organized topical discussions became the basis of a theory of restricted and elaborated codes (Bernstein, 1962-a). In the early studies it was argued that working-class children were less sensitive to the internal meanings of words, less able to communicate logical propositions, less curious about their environment. Simply, they were less equipped to learn (Bernstein, 1958/75). Although the British researcher later rejected the use of his work by American deficit proponents he shared the initial assessment that the language of working-class children was impoverished.

Proponents of deficit theory in the United States can be put into two groups according to the kind of deprivation they envisioned. The first group postulated a serious deficiency in basic language resources. It was reported that working-class minority children spoke a language whose grammatical pattern was "full of errors." Additionally, it was claimed that they made meager use of prepositions to express logical relationships and that their speech revealed a predominance of present tense and incorrect tense forms. Last, it was maintained that minority children spoke in incomplete sentences and were unable to produce a coherent stretch of talk (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966). The second group referred to deficiencies in language use, rather than language structure. One set of researchers characterized working-class environments as a stimulus which was deficient because it offered inadequate opportunities to use language in cognitively

complex ways. According to this view, minority children suffered from a deprivation of verbal stimulation in the home environment, a deprivation resulting in deficient cognitive patterns (Whiteman & Deutsch, 1968). Another set of researchers treated class as a discrete array of experiences, which among the working-class poor produced deficient cognitive processes. Like the other researchers, they argued that the behavior which led to failure in school was learned early in childhood. The interactions which occurred between a mother and her child were said to lack "cognitive meaning" because the child was not encouraged to use language to inquire, discover, and reason (Hess & Shipman, 1968; Hess, 1970).

While pointing to a valid relation between social experience and acquired language skills, deprivation theory was flawed both in its assumptions about language and behavior and its use of linguistic evidence. Deficit theory is a social pathology model. It assumes homogenous norms for language and behavior which hold across society; departures from these norms are seen as deviations, or pathologies, which must be corrected. Unheedful of linguistic and cultural diversity, the more extreme advocates of deprivation theory mistook the development of a single variety of language--Standard American English--as evidence of a universal capacity: the development of language. From this perspective, all departures from the norm were not only deemed errors, but were taken as evidence of a lack of language itself. This preposterous view has been soundly rejected, at least in academic circles (cf. Edwards, 1976-b; Labov, 1972-c).

In forming their conclusions about linguistic structure and cognitive ability, deprivation advocates relied on linguistic evidence drawn from a few restricted domains. Bereiter and Engelmann administered a

sentence-completion test and relied on random impressions for the remainder of their data (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966). Whiteman and Deutsch did not observe language behavior. Instead, they used scores from intelligence tests and conducted interviews with subject children about language use in the home (Whiteman & Deutsch, 1968). Hess and Shipman conducted two interviews with parents concerning language use, administered intelligence tests to children, and observed mother-child interaction in an experiment conducted at a university (Hess & Shipman, 1968).

A problem with this research is its failure to take into account the discontinuity between people's professed and actual behavior. Another problem with this research arises from its failure to consider the probable bias in evidence of linguistic capabilities taken from standardized tests and interaction sessions restricted to formal laboratory settings. Standardized intelligence measures frequently introduce covert linguistic and cultural biases which discriminate against working-class and minority students (Hall & Freedle, 1975). Additionally, interaction experiments in formal university settings are unfamiliar to working-class and minority children, they provoke guarded, defensive responses and strategic silences (Drucker, 1971; Labov, 1972-c).

Difference Models and Their Limitations

Critics of deprivation theory were quick to argue that minority dialects were not unsystematic departures from ideal linguistic and behavioral norms, but rather were complete cultural and linguistic systems in their own right. Behavior in these systems might depart considerably from the expectations of researchers and educators accustomed to Standard English and the behavior of middle-class children. The departures, however,

were not straightforward evidence of linguistic ability or cognitive processes, but rather were evidence of social and stylistic variation (Baratz & Baratz, 1970; Labov, 1972-c). The important advance of difference theory was the demonstration that the social situation in which speech is observed is a major source of variation (Hall & Dore, 1979).

Research which attended carefully to situation and task in studying the verbal behavior of minority children refuted every major empirical claim put forth by deficit proponents. Consider the claim that minority children suffer from a deprived "verbal stimulus" in their homes and communities. Numerous studies have shown that such children enjoy, in the home and with their peers, an exposure to language which is lexically, syntactically, and rhetorically complex. Research which observed mother-child interactions in a variety of natural situations found that minority children received instructions, queries, and requests which rival those of their middle-class counterparts in lexical and syntactic complexity (Hall & Dore, 1979; Hall & Tirre, 1979). Labov's work on inner-city vernacular language (Labov, 1969) showed the effect of setting, topic, and interviewer-interviewee role relations on the verbal behavior of a minority child. When the interview consisted of an adult-child dyad and the topic was unfamiliar, the child was evasive and inarticulate. But when the interview was restructured to include a playmate and familiar topics were introduced, the child was engaged, articulate, and argumentative (Labov, 1969). In a similar vein, Edwards (1976-a) refuted the claims of Bernstein about the lack of lexical elaboration and the context-dependent quality of working-class children's speech. His study demonstrated that working-class youths produced utterances equal in nominal and syntactic complexity to the

utterances of their middle-class counterparts, when the need to be explicit was understood, that is, when the experimental task was clearly presented and perceived. Last, systematic study of social dialects has disproved the claim that working-class minority children speak a structurally impoverished language. Rather than a language full of "errors," Black English Vernacular is a different system (Labov, Cohen, & Roberts, 1969; Labov, 1972-a). Its differences are not matters of individual error, but are the differences, vis a vis Standard American English, of a major social dialect.

Although difference models provided a healthy critique of deficit theory, as an explanation of educational failure they have been less successful. This is due, in part, to their focus on aspects of sentence-level grammar--phonology, lexicon, and syntax. As Labov argued in an early paper, structural interference at the level of phonology and syntax plays a relatively minor role in reading comprehension problems. Instead, the social conflicts in the classroom which are triggered by the symbolic meaning of BEV (Black English Vernacular), as an emblem of ethnic identity are more important causes of reading problems (Labov, 1967). This argument has been supported by later studies (McDermott, 1974; Melmed, 1971; Piestrup, 1973). In a review of recent research aimed at testing the difference hypothesis, Simons (1979) concludes that phonological, lexical, and syntactic features of BEV do not significantly impair reading comprehension of Standard English text. Summarizing earlier research, he argues that dialect is important as a social issue rather than a cognitive problem, that is, it is important insofar as it influences classroom interaction, but not as a source of abstract linguistic interference.

Class, Culture and Educational Discourse

Both deficit and difference explanations focus on a valid relation between social experience and habitual patterns of language use. One way of getting at that relation is to say, as was said in the introduction, that different social classes are socialized to different social roles. The roles, in turn, evoke expectations and specify social actions, as appropriate to certain contexts. If we agree, following Bernstein (1964-a), that socialization into role is accomplished and reinforced through speech, then it follows that prominent among the expectations evoked and the actions specified are those involving language.

But researchers differ in what they regard as the most important aspect of the socialization process. Many deficit researchers focused on mother-child interactions (Whiteman & Deutsch, 1968; Hess & Shipman, 1970). Difference researchers have tended to take a wider view. Some focused on early childhood interaction, but expanded observation to include a variety of situations (Guthrie, 1981; Hall & Dore, 1979). Others have studied adolescent networks. One of Labov's most important findings about Black English Vernacular is that it is maintained in "street culture" (Labov, 1972). In particular, it is in the speech of teenage adolescents in urban areas that BEV diverges most from Standard English. What the difference studies show is that the simple equation of class with code and educational outcome is overly crude. Rather it has been necessary to look more closely at situations, tasks, and social networks.

But it is equally clear social inequality is reproduced in the School, along race and class lines. And it is undeniable that verbal "codes" of some sort are implicated in the process of reproducing inequality (Bourdieu,

1977; Rist, 1977). Working-class minority homes and communities emphasize certain local institutions, social relations, and ways of organizing conduct and speech. Public schooling, on the other hand, represents a non-local institution with its own networks of social relations and its own ways of organizing conduct. As historians of education have documented, schools have always stood in partial opposition to the values and modes of conduct found in working-class and minority communities--perhaps because the school has the contradictory task of reconciling the promise of democracy with the reality of a class-divided society (Bowles & Gintis 1976; Nasaw, 1978).

This section will attempt to reconcile a macroscopic focus on class and race in education with a microscopic focus on the small-scale organization of activity and communication. First I will briefly review studies of social history which suggest some sources of discontinuities between the communicative demands of the home and school. This review will include a discussion of social class which seems most useful for the study of language and minority education and a discussion of the relation between social class and minority-group status. The discussion will then focus on comparative studies of language use in minority communities and in the classroom. These studies have documented the conflicting ways of organizing interaction and structuring discourse when home and school are compared. They suggest that cultural differences in ways of organizing classroom participation and in rhetorical style contribute to the discontinuity between the language of the home and community vs. the school. This section concludes that descriptions of discontinuity are insufficient. Rather, investigation of the influence of communicative background on classroom

learning must take into account the institutional goals of education, primarily the inculcation of literacy skills. But let us now briefly consider the influence of class and culture on social relations.

Class Oppression and Cultural Response

In what follows I will try to convey the dynamic and changing nature of class groupings and class oppositions. For this purpose the most useful approach to the study of social class is offered by the European tradition. It treats class as a general relation to the productive apparatus of society; the formation and transmission of class groupings are a central concern. Because this tradition is concerned with the role of class antagonisms in the development of communities and social institutions, it suggests an explanation for the frequent connection between minority-status and membership in the working class.

The reason for preferring this approach to an American quantitative model is that the quantitative approach usually assumes that class structure is an empirical given rather than an evolving relation. Canonized in sociological studies of New England townships, such approaches treat social structure as a configuration of features of occupation, income, and education. It is an approach used in large-scale studies of language use and social stratification (Labov, 1966); it permits empirical rigor; and it is useful for mapping short-term language changes. But as critics have noted, it gives a static, fragmented picture of society which impairs understanding both of social structure (Mills, 1961; Thompson, 1963) and of patterns of language use (Gumperz, 1976). Additionally, as Labov argued nearly a decade ago, when studying the educational problems of minorities, there is no need to make delicate distinctions between the socioeconomic status of

the working class and the lower class. Rather, the fundamental issue is the confrontation between children from both high and low strata of the working class and the educational institutions of our society (Labov, 1972-c).

As numerous social historians have shown, the development of an industrial order is always accompanied by political struggles between elites and masses. The combination of political struggle and economic transformation produces an alienation between social classes which may or may not parallel ethnic divisions within a society. Although in Britain, for example, the primary social division has been along class rather than ethnic lines, in the United States the picture has been more complex. The formation of social classes has been influenced by successive waves of immigration, with each immigrant group facing discrimination and segregation of varying intensity and duration. The fact that most of these groups, along with racially oppressed minority groups, often fell into the lowest strata of the industrial order has further confused class structure and ethnic group membership (Ogbu, 1978; Wilson, 1979).

The development of distinct communities along class and ethnic lines follows upon urbanization and industrialization. Complex divisions of labor create social and economic segregation. Segregation, in turn, serves as a spur to the development of networks of social relations--of work, kinship, friendship, religious observation, and political mobilization (cf. Nasaw, 1979, p. 68, for a description of the process in nineteenth century American-Irish communities). Such networks are imbedded in institutions which are themselves shaped by class antagonisms. For example, American Blacks in the post-Reconstruction South, American Indians after

the Wars of the West, and the English working class in the early nineteenth century were subjected to an oppressed subordinate status after major civil conflicts. Reaction to this subjection catalyzed the development of institutions for self-protection and political response.

For example, in both Black and Native American communities extended families are commonly found. Whatever the cultural origin of this kinship pattern, it serves as an efficient means of pooling scarce resources and providing "social insurance" for the family during hardship (Aberle, 1969; Hill, 1972). In nineteenth century English working-class communities it was common to find friendship societies--tightly knit groups of kin and peers who came to one another's aid in times of need (Thompson, 1963). More overtly political institutions are also found. In Black communities, Church and racial advancement organizations have served as the center of recurring struggles for civil rights (Ogbu, 1978). In Native American communities, pan-tribal pow-wows, which combine political and cultural expression, have flourished since the end of the nineteenth century. The English trade union movement, which was built upon the organizational foundations of the friendship societies, provided a focus for working-class cultural tradition as well as for making political and economic demands.

These institutions of mutual aid and political response result from ethnic and class organization and self-awareness. Their existence implies social networks and through those networks, access to various speech events. For example, in communities where extended families flourish, relations between children and adults are typically different from the child/adult relations of nuclear families. In the former case, lateral groupings of

peers are more prominent in the social life of youth; in the latter, role-differentiated groupings of adults and children are more common. (As we will see below, such differences influence preferred structures of participation.) As another example consider the traditional English working-class community with its stress on loyalty to peers and kinsmen, in opposition to the ethos of individual self-advancement touted by the contemporary middle class. In recent decades, sociologists (Gans, 1962) and culture historians (Hoggart, 1962) have described the effect of working-class loyalty to family and peers on family structure and individual motivation to attain higher education. Sociolinguists have investigated the normative role close-knit networks of family and friends play in preserving non-standard, local dialects (Milroy & Margrain, 1980).

Taken together the foregoing studies provide a brief sketch of the relevant social dynamics of working-class and minority communities: alternative political, cultural, and familial institutions; tight-knit groups of peers, with primary loyalty to family and community. The significance of these dynamics is that long-term networks of association lead to the formation of shared discourse conventions. These conventions index communicative goals, plans, and activities, creating a presuppositional framework within which speech signals are interpreted. Edward Sapir aptly characterized the trade-off between social relations, linguistic form, and communicated meaning with his remark that "A single word passed between members of an intimate group, in spite of its apparent ambiguity, may constitute a far more precise communication than volumes of carefully prepared correspondence interchanged between governments" (1931-b, p. 106). Bearing in mind this connection between institutions, networks, and forms

of speaking, it can be seen that the foregoing studies bolster the claim that significant discontinuities exist between the ways of organizing talk and conduct in the school, and the ways typical of working-class and minority communities and homes. The discontinuities exist, and centrally affect educational performance, because the School presupposes different social relations than the minority community and, through those relations, different ways of organizing discourse. As is noted above and discussed more fully below (under "Literacy and Situated Interpretation"), the crucial issue is not just that discontinuities exist, but rather that they trigger implicit evaluations and thus form the basis for grouping students into ability-tracks, a process which becomes self-validating. But first let us turn to some recent studies of language use which have provided documentation on the forms home/school discontinuities take.

Language Use in the Community and Classroom

A first type of discontinuity involves preferred organization of group activities. In an early study of classroom organization, Philips (1972) compared patterns of classroom participation among Indian and non-Indian children. She introduced the concept of "participant structures" to characterize the configuration of norms, mutual rights, and obligations that shape social relations and influence learning. Briefly, she found that Indian children participated more effectively in classroom activities which minimized the need for individual display and teacher control. The children's preference for these kinds of activities reflected the kinds of relations which they were accustomed to: On the reservation networks of children were more important than hierarchical networks of adults and children. Other studies have corroborated Philips' findings. Failure to

learn has been attributed to discontinuities between the participant structures of the community and those of the school for other Native Americans (Cazden & John, 1969; Erickson & Mohatt, 1981), for American Blacks (Kochman, 1972), for Hawaiian-Americans (Au, 1980; Boggs, 1972), and for working-class British (Bernstein, 1975).

One part of the argument about discontinuity is as follows. Classroom activities which emphasize individual display of knowledge and teacher control of rewards and error-correction predominate in most schoolrooms. It is in these activities, organized into role-differentiated networks of adults and children, that middle-class children participate enthusiastically and effectively, while minority and working-class children tend to exclude themselves.

A second type of discontinuity, less well documented than the first, has to do with the relation of speaker/audience collaboration to the kind of discourse obtained. Many studies have commented on the inexplicit quality of the speech of Black (e.g., Labov, Cohen, & Roberts, 1969) and Native American students (e.g., Dumont, 1972). A major characteristic of this referentially inexplicit style of discourse is the importance assigned to overt and continuous validation of the speaker via feedback mechanisms. Speakers openly seek validation; audiences offer overt evaluations of speech; the role of speaker and audience is fluid, with frequent speaker-turn changes (Kochman, 1972). The style evokes a dialogue because the message is constructed in the process of speaker-audience exchanges. Similar remarks about the relation of explicitness to speaker/audience exchanges have been made concerning Native American students (Cooley, 1979; Philips, 1972) and working-class British youth (Bernstein, 1962-b).

Studies of speech events in minority communities suggest a source of this style of discourse. Much research has emphasized that effective participation in working-class Black communities requires skills in verbal interaction. These skills are developed in dialogue-like events, with constant audience validation of the speaker's performance. The events include children's and adult's signifyin' and rappin' (Kochman, 1972; Mitchell-Kernan, 1971); adults' oral narratives (Labov, 1972-b); and gospel preaching (Gumperz, 1978). For many years linguistic and folkloristic studies have drawn attention to the dramaturgical quality of many Native American oral narratives. Rather than static recitations, these speech events are performances in which audience feedback is crucial in shaping the form of the narrative (Hymes, 1968; Jacobs, 1959; Scollon & Scollon, 1979, 1981; Toelkan, 1969).

This way of organizing discourse contrasts with the organization of talk found in most classrooms. In classrooms a preferred format is for individuals to display knowledge verbally in situations where speaker-turns are allocated by the teacher and audience feedback, or "interruptions," are discouraged (Philips, 1972; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). In addition, lexically and syntactically precise language is favored; messages are to be explicit, requiring little context to be understood (Bernstein, 1975, postscript; Cole & Scribner, 1973).

The similarity between this way of organizing talk and adult, middle-class speech has often been noted. Studies of the speech of middle-class adults in Britain have discussed the predominance of ego-centric speaker-evaluation and the context-independent quality of that speech (Bernstein, 1964-b). Studies of the narratives of middle-class adults in the United

States have described the prevalence of speaker-evaluation and lexically and syntactically explicit language (Chafe, 1981; Labov, 1972-b). In both cases the speaker's self-conscious commenting on the message is highlighted and lexical and syntactic elaboration is normal. This way of speaking evokes a monologue because the speaker both constructs and comments upon the message. There are feedback mechanisms, of course, but overt audience participation is downplayed.

The studies of participation structures discussed above demonstrate that the typical organization of classroom activities clashes with the modes of cooperation and communication learned in the community and preferred by working-class and minority youth. The result is that one class of students confronts an organization of classroom communication at odds with those structures of participation in which they most effectively take part. The dialogue-like style of organizing oral discourse, with its emphasis on peer evaluation, is also downplayed in the classroom, to the detriment of minority and working-class students. In short, these studies report a basic congruence between "middle class" ways of displaying and acquiring knowledge through language and the ways of displaying and acquiring knowledge typically found in institutions of formal education.

Although it is presumed that our public education system provides equal opportunities to all students, inequality persists because access to learning opportunities is restricted both by structures of participation and by evaluations of ability which are sensitive to differences in discourse style. (In addition to the references in the preceding section, the interested reader should consult the many articles collected by Karabel

and Halsey, 1977, especially pp. 167-307 and 473-544, and Hymes, 1981, pp. 126-160).

Literacy and Situated Interpretation

In order to better understand this issue, it is necessary to examine the ways in which sociocultural differences in the organization of discourse interact with the major institutional goals of education. Schooling in modern society can be characterized as a special set of institutional activities which center on the acquisition of general purpose skills, the most important of which is literacy. As the primary goal of formal education, concern with literacy and literate behavior influences both face-to-face classroom interaction and the cumulative evaluations of ability represented by grade records and standardized test scores. Given this state of affairs it is important to ask (a) what, if anything, constitutes a valid comparison of oral and written language, and (b) what situations within the school provide, or deny, access to the kinds of instruction and practice that result in students learning the skills of literacy.

This section will provide a brief review of some of the received attitudes concerning the relation between language use and literacy. I will then discuss in more detail studies comparing spoken and written language and examining the nature of access to literacy training in typical classrooms.

Received Views on Language Use and Literacy

Half a century ago Leonard Bloomfield made a number of insightful observations about the relations between formal education, language use, and training in literacy skills. He pointed out that the school is where

society deals with its linguistic problems. The attempted solutions usually involve the suppression of vernacular speech, whether the vernaculars are social and regional dialects or distinct languages. Criticizing the schools, Bloomfield argued that through the enforcement of prescriptive grammatical doctrine the school tried to transform speakers of vernaculars into speakers of the standard language. The chief aims of this linguistic authoritarianism was literacy. Prescriptivism was seen as the route to literacy because notions about spoken language were mixed up with knowledge of written language. It was assumed that speech which came closest to the norms for the spoken standard would pose fewest problems of translation into the norms for the literary standard (Bloomfield, 1927, 1933).

Although progress has been made since Bloomfield's critique, in many educational circles it is still assumed that inability to speak Standard English will hinder a student's ability to work with written materials. The confusion of Standard vs. Vernacular with acquisition of literacy has been incorporated into a fifty-year controversy over the proper form reading instruction should take. One side of the debate has insisted that drill in learning the orthography of English must come first in the instruction process. Adherents of this view have shown a consistent tendency to confuse standard pronunciation with mastery of phono-grapheme correspondences (cf. Bloomfield, 1933, for the opening critique; Sledd, 1972, for an update). The other side has insisted that comprehension and interpretation practice should precede the teaching of letter-sound correspondences. Adams (1977), Brown (1968), and Gibson and Levin (1975) provide cogent arguments for the middle position: the need to include all levels of linguistic structure in the training of young readers. (The remarks of these latter researchers have nothing to do with social dialects.)

There is an element of truth to the claim that vernacular speech is further from the norms for written language than is the spoken standard. But the effect of divergence between a vernacular dialect and a literary standard on reading and writing remains an open question. In the United States the difference usually is treated in terms of correspondences between the phonology and syntax of spoken language and the phonology and syntax of written language. As was discussed earlier, experimental attempts to prove the interference of features of BEV on comprehension of materials written in SE have been inconclusive (Gibson & Levin, 1975; Simons, 1979).

Comparing Oral and Written Language

It would seem that what is needed is a model of oral and written language which accurately portrays what people do when they speak and write. But the usefulness of simple bipartite models is questionable. In a recent review, Akinnaso (1982) compares research on spoken/written differences in Western and non-Western societies. He concludes that the distinction between spoken and written discourse is overly broad. Focusing on the formal linguistic consequences of the two modalities, he argues that the communicative tasks of speakers and writers and the larger communicative events within which the spoken or written message occurs have more telling consequences for language form than does modality per se. In a similar vein, Gumperz, Kaltman and O'Connor (1982) have argued that research comparing oral and written discourse has failed to discover valid differences in formal patterns because investigators have not isolated comparable communicative tasks in speaking and writing. Arguments similar to those of Akinnaso and Gumperz et al. have also been made by Rubin (1980) and Tannen (1981).

Comprehending discourse requires that the listener or reader perceive how one utterance, or stretch of text, relates to what went before. One general 'task' which speakers and writers intuitively seem to share is that of signalling and maintaining cohesion in their discourse. But cohesion is a controversial notion. A matter of much theoretical dispute is what sorts of linguistic, social, and psychological knowledge are involved in perceiving, or inferring, cohesive ties. At a minimum, the study of cohesion must avoid the two major drawbacks of text-semantic theories of cohesion. First, these theories tend to ignore the social activity which encompasses any text. Second, they tend to impose non-patent structures (such as story-grammars) on discourse, without attending to the interplay of reference and intention which constitutes the inherent structure of any discourse (Collins, 1981; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Morgan & Zellner, 1980; van Dijk, 1981).

A study of cohesion in discourse which seeks to avoid these drawbacks must encompass at least two levels of information. On the one hand, it must address the conceptualizations of social action, formulated variously as activity-frames (Levinson, 1981) and social-action-plans (Bruce, 1980), which participants employ in interpreting discourse. On the other hand, it must attend to the "local" problem of determining how reference is established and maintained (Marslen-Wilson, et al., 1981). Although analytically separable the two levels are of course related in any actual process of discourse comprehension.

One heuristic for integrating the two aspects when studying speech and text has been proposed by Gumperz, Kaltman and O'Connor (1982) with the concept of <u>thematic cohesion</u>. The concept concerns the processes by which a spoken utterance or written text is tied together, including the devices

and strategies by which people signal activity, chunk information so as to highlight certain parts and background others, signal topic shifts, and establish and maintain perspective within a topic. There are at least two levels at which thematic cohesion must be signalled. The first, which is concerned with higher-level structure, breaks down into two parts: (a) what is the speech activity currently underway (for example, personal letters, sets of instructions, memorandum vs. casual chat, interview, formal discussion); and (b) what are the structures of knowledge of the world--schemata, frames, and plans--which intersect these speech activities. The second is concerned with lower-level processes: how are topics introduced and maintained; and how is old and new information distinguished.

In what follows two studies will be discussed which explore the ways in which subcultural differences in conventions for signalling cohesive ties influence educational processes. The first study is concerned with how mismatches in ways of signalling cohesive ties led to minority students receiving less oral preparation for literacy. The second is concerned with how communicative mismatches, ability categories, and teaching techniques affected the process of reading in reading groups.

Thematic Cohesion in Oral and Written Narratives

The question of how thematic cohesion is signalled by young children in both oral and written language was investigated by this writer and S. Michaels (for full discussion, cf. Collins & Michaels, 1980). The study compared the oral and written narratives of black children from working-class backgrounds and white children from professional middle-class backgrounds. The goal of the analysis was to isolate those aspects of middle-class narratives which sounded intuitively "literate" to the casual

listener by analyzing how thematic cohesion was maintained in the narratives of both sets of children. We felt that there were aspects of the black children's oral discourse styles which might make their acquisition of literacy skills more difficult. But more important, we knew, on the basis of one researcher's (Michaels) year of participant observation, that the teacher of both groups of students responded negatively to the narrative style of the black students. We hypothesized that the negative response was due, at least in part, to a lack of shared conventions for signalling cohesive ties in discourse. The teacher was of the opinion that the black children "just rambled" when given an opportunity to narrate. These children, in turn, felt that the teacher cut them short in an unfair and arbitrary fashion (cf. Michaels & Collins, 1982, in press).

Much research has shown that in learning to become literate in school a child has to learn to shift from his or her home-based conversational strategies to the more written-like strategies of discursive prose. To the extent that the language of the home differs from that of the school, the transition to literacy is made more difficult. In this study six oral narratives from young school children were examined for evidence of this process of transition. Four narratives were from first graders, two from fourth graders. Although the narratives were elicited, the study could be seen as a naturalistic experiment because it occurred as part of a year-long ethnographic study of speech events in the classroom and home setting. The task, researcher, and setting were familiar to the subjects.

We showed the children a six-minute film made by W. Chafe in conjunction with a narrative discourse project (Chafe, 1980) and shortly thereafter asked them to tell the researcher about the film; the researcher said she had not

seen it. Our goal in asking the children to organize a monologue recounting the events in the film was to pose an exercise which would place few restrictions on narrative strategy, but would give us some control over what was being reported. Since the first-graders were not yet fluent writers, we also included two fourth-graders in the study, from whom we could get both oral and written narratives on the same topic. The design permitted us to compare different children performing the same task--giving oral narratives--and the same children performing different tasks--giving oral and written narratives.

We were particularly interested in the functions served by prosody in the oral narratives, in part because prosodic features are not available in written discourse, in part because we knew from analysis of classroom speech events that the black students used prosody differently than their white counterparts (Michaels & Cook-Gumperz, 1979).

In analyzing the four first-grade narratives we found that the middle-class narrators used a variety of lexical and syntactic devices to signal agent-focus and co-reference relations. Working-class narrators were more likely to rely on prosodic cues to signal similar relations and distinctions. The white and black fourth-graders' narratives were more fluent and complex, but reflected the style contrast seen in the younger children's narratives. More interesting, the same stylistic dichotomy showed up in their written versions of the same narrative. Let us examine these matters in more detail.

When we compared the narratives simply for number and type of nominal and verbal complements, no conclusive pattern emerged (agreeing with the findings of Edwards, 1976-a, in England). But when we looked at the deployment of complements within and across clause boundaries with regard to the

work they did to provide ties between events in the narrative, we did find clear differences. In the working-class children's narratives, complements tended to be verbal complements, that is, they added information about actions, states, and events. For example:

(1) and the peaches fell out on the ground

The phrase "out on the ground" adds additional information about the verb "fell." In the middle-class narratives, in contrast, complements tended to be nominal complements, which added information about key characters in the narrative. For example:

(2) This boy on this bike came along

In this case the phrase "on this bike" adds additional information about the character referred to as "this boy."

These patterns of using complements were part of more inclusive strategies for maintaining thematic cohesion. It turned out on closer inspection that the two groups differed in the way in which they identified a character in the film and later re-introduced that character into the narrative. The white middle-class narrators used complex nominal syntax when introducing a new character. Then, in referring back to this character, after other events or characters had been talked about, the children used embedded complements, as well as lexical and grammatical parallelism, to re-establish reference. The black working-class narrators were more likely to use appositional structures when introducing a character. When referring back, re-establishing the character in the narrative, they used a special prosodic cue--vowel elongation with a high rise-fall intonation. Let us contrast two examples. A middle-class child begins:

(3a) . . . there was a man/

. . . that was . . . picking some . . . pears

Twenty-four lines later she mentions the character again, saying:

(3b) . . . they . . . walked by the man/

who gave/ . . . wh-who was picking the pears

Note the use of relative clauses to establish and maintain reference to "the man." A working-class child begins:

(4a) . . . it was about/ . . . this man/

he was um/ . . . um . . . takes some . . .

peach/ . . . some . . . pea--rs off the tree/

Twenty-five lines later he mentions the character again, saying:

(4b) . . . when he passed/ by that ma--n/

. . . the man . . . the ma--n came out the tree/

Note the use of vowel elongation (V^--) and a high rise-fall intonation contour (/^\) to indicate definiteness when the character is re-established in the narrative.

One style of narrator uses relative clauses to pack information around a nominal indicating a major character, using that information when re-introducing the character. The other style introduces characters with appositional constructions, relying on a specialized prosodic cue to signal "definiteness" in later mentions. Both styles are communicatively effective, but they make different interpretational demands on the listener. The first strategy requires general knowledge of English lexicon and syntax. The second requires, in addition, knowledge that vowel elongation and contoured intonation signals definiteness.

Furthermore, this stylistic difference is found in the fourth-grade narratives. The black fourth-grader relies more on prosodic cues than his white counterpart. Although a good writer in many other respects, he has difficulty in his written narrative just at those points where, in his oral narrative, he uses prosodic cues to distinguish major characters. It is when the man picking pears is re-introduced into the story that this fourth-grader fails to make the necessary lexical/syntactic distinctions. Consequently, his text is ambiguous. The middle-class fourth-grader uses relatival complements to distinguish major characters in both his oral and written narratives; his written version is unambiguous.

These findings are tentative because the sample is small. But an analysis of similar narratives collected from other children in the same classroom showed a clear black working-class/white middle-class difference on this use of strategies to introduce and re-establish reference to major characters (Herb Simons, personal communication). Additionally, there is indirect support from other sources. Smith (1969) has discussed the use of appositional constructions rather than relative clauses in BEV. And we have encountered the use of this prosodic strategy in the narrative styles of adult women from the same community (cf. Mitchell-Kernan, 1971, for the only substantive empirical study of language use in this community).

I have touched on the educational implications of these style differences in discussing the fourth-grader whose writing was ambiguous at those points where in oral narrative he used a prosodic convention to evoke a presupposed "context." In learning the strategies of discursive prose this student, and others like him, will have to learn a new convention for signalling cohesive ties between successive mentions of a character.

Additionally, as Michaels (1981) has argued, this use of prosody to maintain thematic cohesion has implications for classroom interaction. In the classroom studied, the teacher was not sensitive to this way of signalling presuppositions; she was frequently baffled by the narratives of students who used this cue. The result was disharmonious, unproductive exchanges during "sharing time" sessions. These sessions, sometimes called "show and tell," were opportunities for students to learn a particular style of classroom discourse. Michaels dubbed them "an oral preparation for literacy" because certain modes of topical elaboration were implicitly developed, in dialogue with the teacher, during the students' turns at telling narratives. But one group of students had far fewer opportunities to learn these modes.

Language Use and Access to Literacy Practice

Michaels' findings suggested that it might be profitable to explore links between the differences in strategies used for signalling thematic cohesion in narratives and the question of how language use affects access to learning opportunities. A study by the writer (for fuller discussion, cf. Collins, to appear), as part of the same ethnographic project as the research just summarized, looked into the issue of access to classroom reading instruction. It examined the interaction of teaching techniques and communicative styles in first-grade reading groups. The primary research question was to what extent the learning opportunities students were exposed to were influenced by two variables; (a) the ability groups into which students were placed; and (b) communicative background, as gauged by sociocultural background and analysis of oral narratives.

The study built on a long line of research which has established the existence of differential treatment at all levels of the school environment

(Leacock, 1969; McDermott, 1976; Piestrup, 1973; Rist, 1970, 1977). In particular, it built on the studies of Piestrup and McDermott. Piestrup showed the influence of teachers' attitudes to dialect on teaching techniques and reading achievement outcomes. McDermott clarified a number of important aspects of the reading instruction process and showed how it differs across ability groups. First, he showed that much less time was given to the actual task of reading with low-ranked groups (one-third of the time spent by the high-ranked group). Second, he was among the first to see that the instructional process is collaborative: Teachers and students build upon one another's verbal and kinesic signals. The collaborative process unconsciously creates a pattern of interaction which is either harmonious and directed at reading or disharmonious and filled with interruptions. In our study we concentrated on language use in reading group instructions, looking at the process as a verbal analogue to the kinds of non-verbal structuring of the classroom environment which McDermott had studied. By looking at language, we expected to be able to show how the kinds of interaction patterns he observed were linked to communicative background and interactional history.

Recent work in the analysis of natural conversation has shown that nearly all successful communication is a process of exchanges in which conversants build upon the contributions of a previous speaker or speakers. In our attempt to study the influence of community-based discourse styles on classroom interaction and reading instruction, we assumed that learning is an interactive process requiring similar sorts of collaboration between students and teachers (a perspective supported by recent research on language learning, Snow & Ferguson, 1977; pre-schooling, Dowley-McNamee,

1979; and classroom learning, Mehan, 1979; Wells, 1981). If this were so, it followed that the collaborative learning process could be studied profitably by using concepts and techniques developed for the analysis of natural conversation. Because much research has shown that inferencing processes are crucial in language comprehension, and especially crucial in conversation, we relied upon a notion of conversational inference. This concept refers to the situated process of interpretation by which participants in a conversation assess other participants' intentions and respond on the basis of that assessment (Gumperz, 1982-a). As with the notion of thematic cohesion, conversational inference refers to two levels of communicative intention: (a) the perception of activity; and (b) chunking of information into units and the signalling of given vs. new information. Because it refers to activities as well as utterance-level signalling of intention, the concept offers some purchase on the issue of how differing interpretations arise and how they in turn contribute to patterns of differential interaction.

From classroom observation we knew that the reading groups of the first-grade class had been subjected to differing sorts of instruction from the very beginning of the school year. The low group received much more instruction in phonics drill than other groups. The relation of instruction difference to apparent ability was not clear. An initial analysis of selected reading lessons showed that the differential emphasis in instruction noticed by the classroom researcher continued throughout the year. Comparison of the groups revealed a two-tiered structure of differential treatment. On one level, the more general one of amount of time spent at various types of instructional activities, low-group readers were given

extensive phono-grapheme drill, with little attention paid to the meaningfulness of the reading task; conversely, their high-group counterparts were given much more exercise in passage-reading and the answering of questions about the material being read from. On the other level, that of specific instructional procedures, correction of low-group reading errors focused on phono-grapheme correspondences and word-recognition; conversely, correction of high-group errors focused on the semantics and pragmatics of text comprehension.

This analysis of a two-tiered structure of differential treatment was exploratory; as with the preceding study, it was based on a small sample (eighteen lessons). Further research is needed, with more careful comparisons of classrooms, reading tasks, and teaching styles. But there are several reasons for suspecting that such differences are symptomatic of more general patterns found in early reading instruction. First, where ethnographic studies have taken notice of ability groups in reading instruction, similar findings are reported. Gumperz and Hernandez (1972) have described an identical emphasis on decoding vs. meaning in the instruction given high-ranked vs. low-ranked readers in ethnically complex classrooms; McDermott has described a similar state of affairs (1978). Second, systematic comparative studies corroborate the ethnographic reports. In Leacock's (1969) comparative ethnography of city schools, she found that in inner-city schools there was an emphasis on control behavior in reading groups, rather than an emphasis on communication and learning. Allington (1981) conducted a study focusing on reading groups and instruction strategies. Using audio-recordings from twenty classrooms, in sixteen different school districts in New York state, he found that low-ranked

readers are corrected more quickly and consistently than their high-ranked counterparts, for all types of errors. Additionally, the correction cues are different. Cues given low-ranked readers usually concern grapho-phoneme correspondences, while those given high-ranked readers usually concern larger language units of syntax and semantics (cf. the studies reviewed in Allington, 1982).

We had evidence of significant differences in amount of time spent on various reading tasks and of differing correction strategies used for similar or identical miscues. One plausible hypothesis, which we were not able to test in this study, was that the distinct "schemata of reading" reported in the literature on children's conceptions of the purpose of reading (cf. Carney & Winograd, 1979, for a review) resulted from the different emphases found in our material and documented elsewhere.

Our main concern, recall, was with the mutual influences of communicative styles and learning opportunities. We narrowed this by concentrating on the relationship of reading aloud style and correction strategies. We treated the two as mutually reinforcing cues for conversation inferencing processes: the children's reading aloud styles influencing the teacher's conception of their reading abilities; the teacher's corrections, in turn, influencing the students' conception of the task, their "schemata for reading" (Carney & Winograd, 1979). In order to examine this relationship we selected passages in which the same teacher worked with high-group and low-group readers as they read from texts of equal complexity. The texts were transcribed with a detailed prosodic notation, which enabled us to analyze how different readers divided the text into "information units" (Halliday, 1968), that is, how they segmented the text into breath groups

and signalled intonational prominence within groups. Because of our concern with the place of conversational inference in classroom interaction, we analyzed the placement of tone group (i.e., breath group) boundaries and tonal contours for their predictive value. That is to say, analysis sought to establish the language units being demarcated by tone groupings and nuclei placement. This goal required simultaneous attention to two discourse levels, both (a) the phrasal and sentential constituencies of the text being read and (b) the teacher-student exchanges occurring during a turn at reading.

The analysis revealed that members of the two groups had different reading styles or prosodic strategies for handling a text. One strategy seemed to treat words as independent elements, placing tone groups and contours in such a way as to make it difficult to ascertain sentence constituencies. The other strategy placed tone groups and contours in such a way as to make constituency identification relatively easy: it used falling contours in utterance-final position, emphasizing sentence boundaries. The different strategies seemed to reflect different views of the purpose of reading, one viewing reading merely as word pronunciation, the other viewing it as a search for meaningful structure (at least to the level of sentence). Teachers' correction strategies seemed to tacitly assume the different conceptions of purpose and respond accordingly.

But there were suggestive similarities between the reading styles and what we considered to be community-based discourse styles. An analysis of oral narratives, of which the research summarized above was a part, provided evidence that the use of prosody in reading was related to other aspects of oral discourse. In particular, high-ranked readers tended to place

tonal nuclei at the ends of clauses, near tone group boundaries. Low-ranked readers, on the other hand, tended to place tonal nuclei in the middle of clauses, away from boundaries. While both ways of organizing narrative discourse are communicatively effective, they sound different. The high-group members talked in such a way that sentence boundaries were more easily discerned by the casual adult listener. Additionally, their habit of placing tonal nuclei in clause-final position translated more easily into the strategy of using falling intonation on sentence-final words when reading aloud. It sounded proficient, even when the reading performance was broken and halting, because it was easier to hear the sentence boundaries. Conversely, the low-ranked readers' habit of placing nuclei mid-clause translated less easily into a strategy of using falling intonation on sentence-final words when reading aloud. It sounded less proficient because it was difficult to hear the sentence boundaries in the text being read aloud.

Given the exploratory nature of the research and the novelty of the hypotheses, it is difficult to say whether the placement of nuclei in clause-final position is a formulaic habit of language learned in the home and community or a result of advanced text comprehension. Similarly, it is difficult to say whether the placement of nuclei in mid-clause is an oral discourse convention (that is, a community-based habit) or an index of inferior text comprehension. We do have initial evidence that community-background and reading style are related, but more controlled study of oral narratives and passage reading is needed, comparing prosodic strategies in tasks of differential complexity. Nevertheless, although causes of performance are complex, our evidence suggests that there is an interaction

of communicative background and pedagogy which, through a process of cyclic reinforcement, helps produce one or the other reading style.

When we looked at the correction strategies used with one or the other group, it appeared that the teacher was socialized to the differing reading strategies. She responded to the different prosodic chunking of texts by handling equivalent errors in very different ways. Numerous examples taken from the entire corpus of eighteen lessons had shown that identical miscues prompted either decoding-focused or comprehension-focused corrections. The four lessons used for controlled comparison confirmed this picture. With the low group corrections concentrated on low-level linguistic instruction about phono-grapheme correspondences and lexical-level composition of texts. But with the high group correction referred to a broad range of text elements and processes. Instruction was provided about orthography and lexical items, as with the low group, but information about clauses, sentences, expressive intonation, and textual inference was also brought into play. These different teaching styles provided very different contexts for the business of learning to read. Thus different styles of prosodically chunking texts seemed to evoke different teaching techniques which cyclically reinforced the styles. The result was either (a) a style with clear sentence-level phrasing of intonation and reading group interaction focused on extraction of meaningful content (even while decoding), or (b) a style without clear sentence-level phrasing and reading group interaction focused words and phono-graphemes in isolation. As low-ranked students read with a prosodic style which made it difficult for larger units to be discerned, the teacher responded with a pedagogical strategy which focused on small text units and seemed to compound any tendency to fragmented text-processing on the part of the students.

In the study we investigated the interaction of oral discourse styles and teaching techniques in early literacy training. The findings were based on materials gathered during a pilot ethnographic study, but were corroborated in ethnographic and comparative literature. We were concerned with different reading styles and argued that they resulted from both oral discourse style and instructional emphasis. Several general conclusions can be drawn.

First, teaching and learning are collaborative processes in which the use of language provides various long-term interactive options on the part of participants. Teachers appear to have implicit models of what literate behavior sounds like (as do most people brought up or educated within the European bourgeois tradition, Bloomfield, 1933; Kress, 1978). Related to this, they appear to have differing expectations about students' readiness or ability to assimilate the skills necessary for literacy. Although non-linguistic criteria, such as social class (Rist, 1970) are also used in setting up ability groups, interactional history is an important confirming influence. We sought the beginnings of this history in the early reading lessons and closely related classroom activities, like "sharing time" episodes. In the early lessons the teachers' expectations helped to produce, and were in turn re-inforced by, the students' conceptions of the task of reading.

Second, an apparent manifestation of students' conceptions of reading are prosodic strategies used for text-processing. These strategies, by treating either single words or phrases and sentences as primary, influenced the interactional options which teachers took. But the strategies were not solely due to task conception, for they shared features with oral narrative styles.

Third, methods of conversational analysis can be useful tools for studying educational processes. Analysis of processes of conversational inference provided insights into the ways in which communicative mismatches reinforce the effects of institutional categorization of ability: they feed into students' and teachers' perception of their interlocutors communicative intent and of the task at hand, that is, reading. This research supports the findings of the preceding study of oral narrative style and earlier related work by Michaels and Cook-Gumperz (1979): where children's community-based discourse habits do not jibe with teachers' notions of narrative schemata and their use of prosodic cues, then learning opportunities are reduced both in quantity and quality.

Evaluation in Language Use and Comprehension

In both of the preceding studies, the focus was on community-based ways of speaking and the acquisition of the skills of literacy. The analysis of narrative and of face-to-face interaction both investigated the role of interpretive processes in signalling and assessing thematic cohesion and in conversational inference. This concern with situated interpretation should be seen as part of a broader tradition which emphasizes the centrality of evaluative perception in all linguistic performance.

The tradition has relevance for educational psychology and the psychology of language. As a major proponent of difference explanations argued nearly a decade ago, unless researchers have some grip on setting, topic, and participants' interpretations of task, they do not control the basic determinants of speech. Comparisons of instances of language behavior are suspect, as are speculations about cognitive processes or

linguistic abilities (Labov, 1972-c). A number of recent appraisals of speech act theory have reinforced the point that evaluative perception is central to linguistic performance. From different theoretical and empirical perspectives, these studies have criticized the conception of speech acts inspired by Austin (1975) and Searle (1969) for its idealization of situation and utterance-bound view of interpretive processes. Drawing upon work in inter-ethnic communication Gumperz (1980) has discussed some of the factors contributing to the assessment of intention in natural discourse. He has argued that speech acts are complex entities in which the relative importance of lexical, syntactic, and prosodic options within a certain event cannot be assigned by fiat, but remains an urgent empirical question. A collection of recent studies (Gumperz, 1982-b) provides a variety of perspectives on this issue. In a comparative critique of speech act theories, Silverstein (1979) has pointed to some basic flaws in approaches which restrict language function to the level of sentence-bound intentionality. Using English and Javanese materials, he shows that when speakers attribute intentions to linguistic behavior they are constrained both by semiotic characteristics of the speech signal (e.g., segmentability and referentiality) and by culture-specific ideologies of the purposiveness of language. He argues that an adequate account of linguistic behavior requires an analysis of situations, participant roles, and cumulative interpretations, as well as of overt lexically-encoded intentionality. A recent essay (1981) explicates this position vis a vis functional approaches to the psychology of language. A study of child language by Hall and Cole (1979) has shown that a model of sentence-level intentions is inadequate to account for the variation found in children's speech. They propose the

notion of task to account for the kind and quantity of speech which the subjects produced. As formulated, this notion concerns participants' assessment of the purpose of ongoing talk. This assessment forms a sort of scaffolding within which changing configurations of setting, participants, and utterance-level intentions are evaluated. Dore (1978) and Guthrie (1981) provide additional discussions and applications of the concept of task.

In addition, as readers of these reports are well aware, there is an accumulating literature on the importance of interactive processes in prose comprehension. This literature concerns the role of readers' background knowledge in constructing an interpretation of written text. It has been shown that the structure of such knowledge--formulated as schemata (Anderson, 1977; Spiro, 1980), plans (Bruce, 1980), and frames (Fillmore, 1977)--is frequently more important than sentence and inter-sentence text structure in determining the interpretation of written text. As with the other studies--Labov, Gumperz, Silverstein, and Hall and Cole--this work on schema-related processes emphasizes the inextricable role of subjective evaluation in language use and comprehension.

Conclusion

Let me summarize: This review has been concerned with the ways in which language has been proposed as an explanation for educational achievement. The linguistic deficit hypothesis was shown to be seriously marred, both by its conception of social and linguistic structure and its use of linguistic evidence. I argued, however, that the deficit hypothesis had received a curious indirect support from structuralist theories of language, both from their focus on the referring and predicating sentence and from

their assumption of a simple correspondence between linguistic and social units. An alternative to the structuralist tradition, concerned with speech communities and linguistic variation, was reviewed at length. I argued that the literature of this tradition showed the importance in linguistic behavior of macrosociological variables such as class, race, and gender and microsociological variables such as situation and task. I further suggested that the literature also provides a general support for the hypothesis of linguistic and cultural differences. But as was pointed out, the available evidence is inconclusive concerning the role of linguistic difference--in particular, dialect difference--as a source of reading problems. Language attitudes seem to be more important influences on classroom learning than structural difference per se.

A brief review of the relevant social history showed why the hypothesis of cultural difference as a source of differential classroom learning could have more explanatory potential. It was argued that reaction to class and racial oppression produces communities typified by ways of organizing conduct and speech that stand in opposition to the institutions, including the school, controlled by dominant classes and cultures. This argument receives support from numerous studies of participation structures and dialogue-like speech events in working-class and minority homes and communities. These structures and events differ from those typically encountered in public schools and are two important aspects of "cultural difference."

I argued that the school's response to cultural difference contributes to the ways in which social inequality is perpetuated in our society and attempted to focus the discussion of cultural difference by relating it

to institutional literacy training and to what is known historically about attitudes to linguistic variety in public schools. These attitudes were discussed under "received views." Briefly, the schools have traditionally equated speaking Standard English with inculcating the skills of literacy. As was pointed out, this view still holds sway in some circles; Piestrup, for example, has provided direct evidence that teachers' language attitudes influence teaching techniques and educational outcomes.

It is difficult to specify the ways in which language attitudes are reinforced in classroom encounters and the ways in which they influence teaching techniques such that certain groups of students find themselves "excluded from the pedagogic message" (Bourdieu, 1977). I discussed two studies at length which attempted to get at this issue from different angles. The first addressed the ways in which one style of discourse appears to be (and in precise if limited sense is) less "written-like" than another style and noted the consequences of style differences for classroom interaction. The second addressed the way in which ability grouping, discourse style, and (apparent) language attitudes interact over the course of a year in such a way that students and teachers negotiate two distinct models of reading. One model, successful, focused on discourse-level chunks of text and the extraction of meaning; the other, much less successful, focused on words and the pronunciation of graphemes.

Two basic conceptual guides in these studies were concern with cohesion in spoken and written discourse and with inferential processes in conversation. I argued that these perspectives were part of a common tendency in studies of language use in the past decade to emphasize the role of situated interpretation in language production and comprehension.

This emphasis is found both in anthropological and psychological studies of language use and in studies showing the importance of reader/text interaction in reading comprehension. The perspectives, and the broader emphasis, can considerably enrich our understanding of the communicative nature of sociocultural differences and of the complex communicative events involved in acquiring the skills of literacy.

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